



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनंता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2024; 10(6): 25-27

© 2024 IJSR

www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 05-09-2024

Accepted: 09-10-2024

Dr. Subodhkant Mishra

Assistant Professor

Center for Indic Studies

Indus University, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat, India

Shweta Tiwari

Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of Hindi,

Banaras Hindu University,

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

From sin to salvation: The ethical framework of atonement in brihaspati smriti

Subodhkant Mishra and Shweta Tiwari

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/23947519.2024.v10.i6a.2506>

Abstract

Brihaspati Smriti, an important ancient Indian text, provides a comprehensive system for atonement (penance) for sins, emphasizing moral, spiritual and social reformation. Various categories of sins described in Brihaspati Smriti, such as *mahapataka* (serious sins), *upapatak* (moderate sins), and *apradha* (everyday transgressions), are analysed. It details the atonement prescribed for each category, ranging from serious crimes such as murder and betrayal to minor transgressions such as lying and neglecting duties. The text also highlights the philosophical and social basis of the atonement system, reflecting the relationship between justice, morality and spiritual advancement in ancient Indian thought. In addition, the relevance of these principles in modern times is also discussed, indicating the possibilities of their use in a system of corrective justice. Through the verses of Brihaspati Smriti, this article explains the importance of atonement in the context of social discipline and individual moral development.

Keyword: Brihaspati Smriti, atonement, sin, Mahapatak, Upapatak, crime, spiritual reform, moral conduct, justice, ancient Indian jurisprudence

Introduction

Brihaspati Smriti is an important text of ancient Indian theology, which provides for atonement (*prayashchit*) for sins. This atonement is a means of reducing the effect of sin, self-purification and reformation of the individual. The classification of sins described in Brihaspati Smriti, appropriate atonement for them, and the related verses are mentioned. Along with this, the philosophical and social significance of these practices is discussed. Brihaspati Smriti is based on the principles of justice, morality, and atonement in the theology tradition. In it, punishment and atonement for sins are not merely punitive, but reformatory and a means of spiritual advancement. This Smriti makes a person aware of the consequences of his actions and paves the way for regaining his place in the society.

Classification of Sins and Atonement in Brihaspati Smriti

Mahapataka (Grave Sins)

Mahapatakas are those sins which not only affect the individual life but are also extremely fatal for the society and culture. Mahapatakas are mentioned in special detail in Brihaspati Smriti because these crimes challenge the moral and spiritual basis of the society. These include grave mistakes like insulting the Guru, murder, killing a brahma, and stealing sacred objects. These sins have a negative impact on the society, and this is why they are considered extremely fatal in Brihaspati Smriti.

Severity of Mahapataka

Mahapataka sins are considered dangerous for the society and *dharma* because they not only affect the life of an individual but also weaken the basic principles of the society, such as truth, *dharma*, and justice. Example: Respect and reverence for the Guru is the basic principle of Indian society. Guru is considered equivalent to God. Insulting the Guru is not only a personal fault, but it also creates deep imbalance in the society. A person who insults the Guru is considered a Mahapataka in Brihaspati Smriti.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Subodhkant Mishra

Assistant Professor

Center for Indic Studies

Indus University, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat, India

Murder is a serious crime in any form, but Brahmahatya (killing of a Brahmin) is considered particularly grave. The Brahmin is an ideal figure of the society and his murder is not only the death of that person, but a cultural crisis for the entire society. Brahmahatya is considered a deep blow against the sanctity of the entire society.

Sacred objects, such as religious items kept in temples, Vedas, scriptures, and other religious symbols are integral parts of Indian culture. Theft of these dishonours *dharmā* and culture in the society, and is considered a Mahapataka.

Gurutaḷpaḡamsteyo brahmaha surapaH. mahāpātākīnā jāyāyaḡ sarvā nirgati vārājitaḡⁱ

In this shloka, crimes like affair with the wife of the Guru, brahmahatya, theft, and alcoholism have been identified as mahapataka. These crimes are taken seriously in the society and are not only considered as sins, but the atonement for these crimes is also very difficult. Due to these crimes, the culprit is thrown out of the society, and he is ostracized from the society.

The process of atonement for mahapataka sins in Brihaspati Smriti has been described as very severe and rigorous. Its purpose is not only to punish, but to guide the person towards mental and spiritual purification, so that he can atone for his sins and regain a respected place in the society.

Murder is considered a very serious sin, and for this, there is a provision of detailed atonement in Brihaspati Smriti. The person who has committed the murder is ordered to do long penance and fasting. Additionally, the person has to chant the Gayatri Mantra 10,000 times. This mantra inspires the person towards mental peace and self-improvement. Along with this, the family of the murder victim has to be asked for forgiveness. This process makes the sinner realize his deeds and opens the way for him to be accepted back in society.

The person who has insulted the Guru is instructed to go on a pilgrimage, as pilgrimage gives a person an opportunity for self-refinement and purification. Apart from this, giving charity is also an important part of this atonement. The charity gives merit to the person's children and he can wash away his sins. Also, he needs to perform special rituals for mental purification to rebuild the reverence and respect for the Guru.

Purpose of Atonement for Mahapatak

The purpose of atonement for Mahapatak sins is not only to punish but also to improve the conduct of the person, to get him a respectable position in the society again and to maintain balance in the society. This process instead of reforming the sinner gives him a new direction so that he can become a more conscious and religious person in future. The process of atonement in Brihaspati Smriti for Mahapatak sins is not only to purify the soul of the person but it also provides a moral lesson to the society. This principle is an effective way to maintain religious and moral discipline in the society. The strict atonement prescribed for the sins of Mahapatak provides an opportunity to the sinner to reform and helps him to establish a respectable position in the society again. Through this process it is ensured that all the people in the society realize their deeds and follow the path of *dharmā* and morality.

Upapatak (moderate sins)

Upapatak is a category of sins in Brihaspati Smriti, which generally relate to violation of morality and discipline of society. These sins are not serious, but can still cause

imbalance in society and disrespect for social duties. The sins that fall in this category include lying, cheating, betrayal, spreading impurity, and neglecting one's duties. Though these sins are less serious than mahapataks, they still have an impact on society and can also harm the self-respect of a person. Brihaspati Smriti prescribes atonement for such sins so that a person can recover from these offences and regain respect in society.

Anritam haranam drohH parivado anrishanta.
Upapatakasajnastu kshamyante prayshchittatahⁱⁱ

Which means, Lying, cheating, betrayal, and mis-behaviour are considered to be sub-pataka sins. These sins may not be serious, but they have an impact on society. These sins can be atoned for.

Atonement for Upapataka's sin

Some methods of atonement in Brihaspati Smriti for upapataka's sin.

According to Brihaspati Smriti, one should observe a day-long fast and chant Gayatri Mantra as atonement for lying. Gayatri Mantra not only helps in mental purification, but also inspires a person to speak the truth. During the fast, a person should reflect on his conduct and try to correct it by realizing his mistake. Example: Lying can weaken a person's relationships, violate trust, and spread distrust in society. Through this atonement, the person tries to correct his faults and can again establish himself as an honest person in the society.

Cheating and betrayal is a big crime from the social and moral point of view. The atonement for this is by donating food to the poor and apologizing to the victim. By donating food, the person gets a chance to reduce the impact of his sins and creates a helpful and kind image in the society. Also, apologizing to the victim gives the person mental peace and he can atone for his sins. Example: When someone has cheated, it is very important to help or apologize to another person to make him realize his act. This not only starts the process of mental purification of the culprit but also provides relief to the victim.

Brihaspati Smriti also states that if a person intentionally causes harm to someone or spreads impurity in the society, he must atone for his deeds. For this, fasting, charity and prayers are practised. This process makes the person realise his mistakes and makes him feel responsible towards the society. Example: A person who intentionally creates disputes among others or spreads false rumours must reconsider his conduct. To atone for these types of offences, the person must contribute to creating a peaceful and cooperative environment in the society again.

Social and Spiritual Aspects

According to Brihaspati Smriti, the aim of atonement for Upapatak sins is not only personal reformation but also to follow morality and truth in the society. During atonement, the person has to introspect on his mistakes and try to establish his rightful place in the society again. This process also promotes a sense of trust and peace in the society.

From a spiritual point of view, atonement provides an opportunity for a person to follow the path of self-improvement and purification, allowing him to overcome his sins and follow higher moral ideals.

Atonement for sins of the Upapatak category is not merely a punitive process, but it leads to self-improvement and social

harmony. According to Brihaspati Smriti, atonement for this type of sins not only helps a person to overcome his karma, but it also helps in establishing correct moral and religious values in society.

Daily Offenses (Apradha)

Daily offenses are those minor violations that may usually occur unintentionally in a person's daily routine, such as eating improper food or error in religious rituals. These offenses do not violate the larger principles and rules of society, but may cause disruption in the religious and moral life of the person. Brihaspati Smriti provides a system of atonement for these minor sins so that a person can purify his actions and re-establish himself as a pure and moral person in society.

Madyam mansrajogandhi bhakshitam yatra tatkritam.
prayashchittaM hi tasyashu snanam danam cha
shuddhayeⁱⁱⁱ

Translates as, drinking alcohol, eating meat, or consuming any improper thing requires atonement to purify a person. Such offenses can be purified by bathing and giving charity.

Atonement for the Aparadha

Brihaspati Smriti gives simple and effective atonement methods for daily offenses.

If a person has eaten improper food, such as meat or alcohol, he should take a bath and chant holy mantras to atone for his sins. Bathing purifies the body and mind, and chanting mantras guides a person towards self-purification. Thus, a person is freed from his sins and moves towards purity once again. Example: If someone has consumed alcohol, he should take a bath and chant holy mantras, such as the Gayatri Mantra, to purify his body and soul.

If a person commits an error in religious rituals, such as making mistakes in worship or not following the rules, he should fast for a day and feed the Brahmins. Fasting increases the sense of self-control, and feeding the Brahmins increases the person's merits. This is also an effective method of purification from the religious point of view. Example: If a mistake is made during worship, fasting for a day and feeding the Brahmins fulfills the religious duties and the person attains religious purity.

Atonement for daily crimes is not only aimed at physical purity, but it also aims at spiritual and mental purification. Actions like bathing and charity re-establish the person in a moral and respected position in the society. Fasting for religious errors and feeding brahmins is not only a means of self-purification, but it is also a way to establish good relations with society.

From a spiritual point of view, this atonement provides an opportunity to a person to realize and correct his errors, so that he can establish balance and peace in his life. Atonement for daily crimes is simple and accessible, but through it a person gets the path of self-improvement and spiritual advancement. The measures of atonement given in Brihaspati Smriti guide a person towards purity and re-establish him as a moral person in the society.

Philosophical basis

The theory of karma has been given great importance in Brihaspati Smriti. According to it, the karma of each person determines the results of his life. The purpose of atonement for sins in Brihaspati Smriti is not only to punish, but its real

purpose is to purify the soul of the person. Atonement not only removes the sins of a person, but it also makes him aware of his karma and leads him towards spiritual advancement. When a person repents his sins, he gets an opportunity to introspect on his conduct and he takes steps towards goodness in the future.

Doshanaam kshapanam yasmaat praayashchittam tu
tadviduh. TapaH shuddhikram proktam dharmashuddhim
karishyati ||^{iv}

Atonement is necessary to erase sins. Penance purifies *dharma* and soul. Through this verse it is clear that atonement is not just a ritual, but it is a deep inner process, which brings purity and morality in a person's life. Penance, fasting, and religious rituals purify the soul of a person, and he gets inspiration to live a moral life.

Social and Spiritual Importance

The process of atonement serves to reestablish a person in society. When a person atones for his sins, he does not get away from the society, but comes back to the society as a reformed person. It helps in maintaining equality and harmony in the society. The process of atonement purifies the soul within the person. It makes him realize his sins and motivates him towards goodness again. This brings a positive change in the mindset of the person and he is inspired to live a moral life. Atonement is an effective process for the reformation of the sinner and to get him his place back in the society. It is not only punitive but a means of reconstruction. Through this, the sinner gets a new opportunity, so that he can stand in his place again in the society.

Conclusion

In Brihaspati Smriti, the purpose of atonement is not only to punish, but it is an important step towards purification of the soul and maintaining balance in the society. It provides an opportunity for internal reform of the person and his welcome back in the society. Its philosophical and practical approach is relevant even today, because it not only improves the spiritual life of the person, but also helps in maintaining peace, harmony and balance in the society. From the theory of atonement, we can learn that every person should be given an opportunity to realize his mistakes and correct them, which will lead to a better personality and positive change in the society.

References

1. Brihaspati Smriti - Critical Edition (Translation: PV Kane); 1930.
2. Kane PV. History of Dharmashastras, Volume 3. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute; 1941.
3. Sharma RS. Ancient Indian Justice System. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas; 2001.
4. Banerjee A. Ethics and Atonement in Indian Traditions. Kolkata: Sanskar Publications; 1998.
5. Chakravarti S. Ritual and Society in Ancient India. Delhi: Primus Books; 2010.

ⁱ Brihaspati Smriti, Chapter 4, Shloka 12

ⁱⁱ Brihaspati Smriti, Chapter 5, Verse 8

ⁱⁱⁱ Brihaspati Smriti, Chapter 6, Verse 3

^{iv} Brihaspati Smriti, Chapter 7, Verse 11